



Representative Karen Schmidt



1998 Legislative News and Questionnaire **23rd District**

COMMITTEES: • Transportation Policy and Budget, *Chairman* • Rules

January 1998

Dear Friends,

Another legislative session is underway and again we are dealing with some major issues. One of the most pressing challenges is how to provide adequate funding of transportation. As chairman of the House Transportation Policy and Budget Committee, I will be closely involved in this discussion over the course of the scheduled 60-day session. This newsletter offers a brief look at this and other issues of the 1998 legislative session as well as news involving Kitsap County. In addition, I have provided a questionnaire to learn your views about some issues we face. Should you have any comments or questions, please feel free to write or call my office. I appreciate the opportunity to serve you.

Cordially,

Karen

Karen Schmidt
State Representative

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TRANSPORTATION FUNDING



Washington state's transportation network faces a crisis that if not addressed will affect our state's economy, jobs and the quality of life we enjoy. Urban areas are becoming clogged. Moving agriculture products from farm to market is difficult and expensive. Existing ferries are unable to handle peak demands. Our state has begun to lose market share to other highly competitive West Coast ports, namely Long Beach, Calif., and Vancouver, B.C.'s, Delta Port where they have spent billions to improve their transportation linkages. With our projected population growth (70 percent over the next 20 years), serious problems will occur if transportation needs are not addressed.

When we discovered a projected transportation revenue shortfall three years ago, I and other House Transportation Policy and Budget Committee members began looking at possible funding sources. First, we studied the transportation

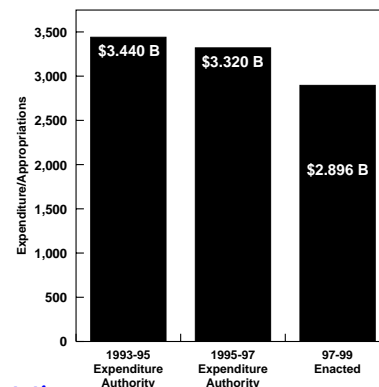
budget line-by-line, item-by-item, looking for efficiencies to direct money into actual highway projects. In the last biennium, we directed \$100 million of savings from administration toward projects. We also suggested other long-term options, including transferring funds from the undedicated portion of the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (money you pay to license your vehicle, also known as MVET) into the transportation budget. That revenue currently goes into the state's general fund budget. The Legislature, however, decided to use the money that year for other purposes, including additional tax relief.

Finally, we were asked to investigate whether there would be support for an increase in the gas tax. Clearly, in the last session, there was not much support.

Last year, the Legislature passed a bare-bones transportation budget that funds preservation, safety and maintenance of existing roadways and allows existing construction projects to be completed. It also included \$50 million from the general fund to expand highway capacity. Additionally, we funded performance audits of the entire transportation system. Any savings realized from those audits will be directed toward future projects.

Unfortunately, the transportation budget continues to fall short of tackling our needs. So this year, leadership has returned to our initial suggestion of transferring money from the undedicated portion of MVET. The difficulty of this is how to do it without harming general fund spending of education money and other vital programs. However, the state is currently enjoying an \$860 million revenue surplus. Although there will be other components to help boost funding of transportation, we expect the MVET transfer will be the centerpiece of our proposal in the 1998 session.

1997-99 Transportation Budget Current Law Budget



Spending in the state's transportation budget has continually fallen since the 1993-1995 biennium.

Representative **Karen Schmidt**

Ferry system adds new vessels



The first of three Jumbo Mark II ferries went into service Nov. 17. The state's fastest and largest double-ended passenger/vehicle ferry, the *MV Tacoma* is now making runs between Bainbridge Island and Seattle. In the near future, it will be joined by two more ferries of equal size, the *Wenatchee* and the *Puyallup*. The state is expected to take delivery of the *Wenatchee* at the end of April. Projected service date is June 21. The *Puyallup* will be delivered to the state in February 1999, with service beginning in May 1999.

Construction is 72 percent complete on the *Chinook*, one of two new high-speed/low-wake passenger-only ferries to serve Puget Sound travelers. With a price tag of \$9.6 million, the *Chinook* will hold up to 350 passengers, and serve the Bremerton to Seattle run. Completion is expected in March, with service to begin in mid-May. The vessel is specially designed to travel at higher speeds, but leave less wake (less than 11 inches at 300 yards), which would minimize erosion in the narrow Rich Passage. The state has the option to build an identical second passenger-only ferry. If all goes as planned, construction would begin in mid-summer with completion the following year.

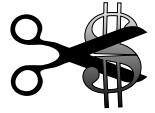


Rep. Karen Schmidt, left, helped constituents obtain a Capital Heritage Project grant to assist in the preservation of the historic Bainbridge Island Fair and the Filipino-American Community Hall. Pictured with Rep. Schmidt, from left, are Lela Sidley, Feline Berganio and Mila Buscit from the Filipino-American community of Bainbridge Island. Also pictured, at right, is Rep. Velma Veloria of Seattle.

Photo credit: G. Elfendabl, Bainbridge Is. Historical Society

Other quick tidbits

Dissipating the ferry fuel tax



For several years, I have worked to remove the sales tax from fuel purchased for state ferries. No other transit system has to pay sales tax on the fuel it uses. Why should our ferry system be any different? Last year, the bill was approved by the Legislature, but vetoed by the governor. I have since spoken to the governor who suggested I re-introduce the measure this year. The exemption would help to free up an additional \$1 million needed to support ferry operations. I remain troubled that the governor has proposed congestion relief for roads and bridges, but has ignored ferry system needs by failing to propose new vessels in his budget.

The coast is clear



With the Legislature's approval last year of a bill I prime sponsored, Washington's pristine coastline will be preserved. The measure makes a moratorium on oil and gas exploration and production off the Washington coast permanent. A temporary moratorium was previously in place since 1989. My legislation made the off-shore drilling ban permanent.

Kingston demonstrates need for passenger-only ferries



I want to thank Tom Waggoner, Brian Whelan and the entire Greater Kingston Community Chamber of Commerce for their involvement last September in hosting a "Passenger-Only Ferry Demonstration Day." This unique demonstration, which involved four ferry runs to Seattle and one to the Navy Home Port in Everett, pointed out how a passenger-only ferry from Kingston would relieve a lot of strain on our current fleet and on our heavily traveled highways. Last year, more than 4 million passengers rode the Kingston-Edmonds run.

Community comes together for safety



Progress is being made on the widening project of Highway 305 between State Route 3 and Bond Road. Support from the Poulsbo community has helped to advance this important project which will significantly eliminate some of the hazards of this roadway. We expect the project will be completed by mid-summer.

Rep. Karen Schmidt

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1998 Questionnaire

23rd District

I'd like to know where you stand on a few issues. I would appreciate your help in completing this questionnaire. When you are finished, cut it from the newsletter, fold and tape it with my address on the outside. Then mail it back to me. Please indicate whether you want to know the final breakdown after we have compiled everyone's response.

1 Gov. Gary Locke has advocated increasing gas taxes by 7 to 11 cents a gallon to pay for transportation improvements in Washington state. Republican leaders are looking at the possibility of using undedicated revenues collected from the motor vehicle excise tax (vehicle licensing tab fees) as a way to provide more transportation funding. Others are proposing to finance highway improvements in a tax-neutral way by raising the gas tax while lowering the motor vehicle excise tax by a commensurate amount. What method would you support?

- ☐ Increase gas tax (governor's plan)
- ☐ Transfer money from the undedicated portion of the motor vehicle excise tax (MVET)
- ☐ Increase gas tax and lower MVET
- ☐ No new money should go to transportation

2 Fares for frequent riders on our state's passenger-only ferries do not cover the actual cost of operations. Commuter books for passengers are currently offered at a 40 percent discount, while car/driver commuter books are discounted 20 percent. The state Transportation Commission is considering equalizing the amounts so that both types of commuter books would be offered at a 20 percent discount and passenger-only riders would pay more of their fair share of the actual costs. Please answer the following:

A. Are you a frequent ferry rider (three or more times a week)?

☐ YES ☐ NO
(If no, please skip down to Question #3)

B. Which do you use more frequently?

- ☐ Passenger-only ferry
- ☐ Vehicle ferry

C. To help support increased ferry service and cover actual cost of passenger riders, would you support the commission's proposal to set the discount rates of both commuter books (passenger-only and car/driver) to 20 percent?

Passenger-only riders mark your answer here:

☐ YES ☐ NO

Vehicle ferry riders mark your answer here:

☐ YES ☐ NO

3 To keep up with increased ferry service demands, our plan calls for three vessels to serve the Bainbridge Island to Seattle run and three vessels to serve the Kingston to Edmonds run. The first of three Jumbo Mark II ferries (the MV Tacoma) being constructed is now in service, with the others not far behind. To meet a deployment plan of three vessels for the Kingston-Edmonds run, a fourth Jumbo Mark II ferry would need to be constructed. If we wait for several years to build this ferry, construction costs are expected to increase. Should we proceed with building the fourth vessel or wait until demands increase?

- ☐ Build it now
- ☐ Wait until demands increase, even though it will cost more to build the vessel
- ☐ Maintain deployment of only two vessels on the Kingston-Edmonds run, regardless of increased demands

4 In 1996, 712 people died in traffic accidents on Washington's highways. Half of those accidents were alcohol related. The Legislature is looking at several measures to crack down on drunk driving.

There are concerns that stricter laws might also lead to increased backlogs in court cases and increased costs in jailing offenders. Some courts are currently so backlogged, they are not even hearing cases below a .13 blood alcohol content (BAC). (State law now says drivers are impaired with a BAC of .10 or higher.) Most accidents involve drinkers with a BAC of .17 or higher.

Would you support stronger DUI laws even though it would cost more of taxpayers' money for additional resources to prosecute and jail offenders?

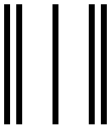
☐ YES ☐ NO

5 For demographic purposes, what is your zip code?

6 Do you wish to receive a copy of the results of this survey?

☐ YES ☐ NO





Please
place
32¢
stamp
here

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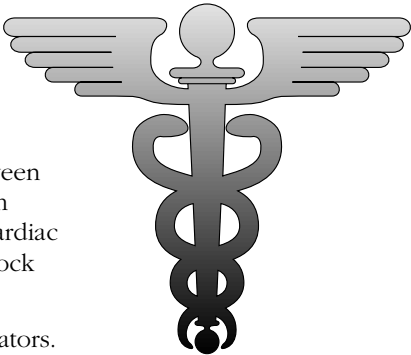


**Bainbridge Island resident's
suggestion will save lives**

Citizens can and do make a difference in their government by getting involved. One example of this is a suggestion given to me about a year-and-a-half ago by Bainbridge Island volunteer firefighter Jim Dow. Jim frequently travels the ferry between the island and Seattle. He has occasionally responded to a page over the ferry system intercom asking for trained help to give medical assistance to someone suffering a cardiac arrest. Jim has administered CPR to these victims until the vessel has arrived at the dock where they are transferred to an awaiting ambulance.

Jim suggested to me that we equip each vessel with automated external defibrillators. These are the paddles that help to shock the heart back into a regular rhythm. Defibrillators can significantly improve a heart attack victim's chance for survival.

I took Jim's suggestion and secured \$90,000 for the purchase of defibrillators. At least one or more defibrillators are now located on every Washington state ferry vessel. I thank Jim for his efforts which will save lives on Washington's waterways. And I encourage anyone with ideas or suggestions for state government to contact me.



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